

A Plan for an Enjoyable Reading Lesson

By Liliana do mara Meneses

During my reading course in the Master's Program in Education at Framingham University, Massachusetts, our professor, Dr. Robbie Robinson, presented a plan for a reading lesson. Since then, I have adapted this format for EFL groups, and presented it in practical workshops to our group of teachers at Associação Brasil América (ABA), Recife. Both students and teachers agree that this plan facilitates and enhances what was otherwise considered a dull classroom task: reading. I have tried, therefore, to write out what actually is a hands-on workshop in the hope that other teachers may benefit from and/or improve on it.

These are the six steps to the directed reading lesson:

1. Lead-in

The story or text is introduced to the students. Give the students the setting (time, place, characters, topic, etc.) The teacher may make a word web on the board or bring in realia, or have the students brainstorm for vocabulary on the topic. The lead-in serves as a warm-up phase, and sparks the students' interest in the theme of the reading.

2. Vocabulary cards

Look through the text beforehand and choose the words that may impair your students' comprehension. Prepare a vocabulary card (approximately 5 x 4 inches) for each word. The vocabulary card should have a visual stimulus on one side and 4 "cues" for the teacher to follow on the other. The cues are:

Elaboration: a synonym or antonym, an explanation of the word.

Link: something by which the student can associate the word to his/her personal experience.

Question: a question that tests the students' understanding of the word.

Every student responds: a form of checking if all the students know the meaning of the vocabulary word.

Example:

Elaboration: "An Indian chief is the leader of the Indians."

Link: "Can anyone think of a famous Brazilian Indian chief?"

Question: "What are the responsibilities of a chief?"

Every student responds: "Turn to your partner and explain what a chief is."

3. Manipulatives

Manipulatives are games or puzzles where students use hands-on activities with the words they have just learned. This helps them to internalize the words' meanings. They should be simple, and contain brief definitions.

The class is divided into groups of four or five students each. There should be as many manipulative games as there are groups. Each group receives a game and when they have finished, the teacher corrects their activity, and passes it on to the next group. In this manner, every group is always working with one of the manipulatives.

4. Setting a purpose

Tell the students that they are now going to read the text. Before reading, set a purpose-fill in a timeline, fill in a form, complete a web. The purpose-setting is a kind of pre-task, which gives the student an explicit reason for reading.

5. Silent reading

All the students receive the text at this point and read silently and individually.

6. Monitoring packet

As each student finishes reading, he/she receives from the teacher a Monitoring packet to complete. This avoids keeping the fast readers waiting for the slower ones, and eliminates distraction after reading. The packet consists of four parts.

Part One-Vocabulary : Questions and/or exercises that check the students' comprehension of the vocabulary that was taught at the beginning of the lesson. Ex: Match the words to the meaning.

Part Two-Detail reading : Questions that ask for specific details about the story. Ex: How many years was the Indian chief away from home?

Part Three-Main idea : An activity to check the students' comprehension of the theme behind the text. Ex: Choose the best title for this story.

Part Four-Interpretive questions : A more elaborate kind of thinking process, interpretation requires that the student understand, analyze, and infer from the written text. Ex: What made the chief feel that he had to return to his tribe?

This approach to a reading lesson may help your class in several ways. Some of its advantages are:

1. It motivates students by preparing them for the theme beforehand.
2. It eliminates frustration caused by lack of comprehension of the text, by presenting the new vocabulary before the reading itself.

3. It teaches new vocabulary in a pleasant way, and helps learners, especially children, to internalize the meaning of the new words.
4. It gives the students a communicative purpose in reading by creating an information gap.
5. It allows the teacher to check each student's progress individually.

After this lesson, I believe the students will be much better prepared for any kind of oral output concerning the reading lesson, and hopefully, more enthusiastic about reading tasks in class, and reading in general.

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